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Manic McSweeney: My Love Affair With My Bipolar II Disorder

Married to the Mob's Leah McSweeney honestly addresses mental health.

By Leah McSweeney · Aug 9, 2016 in Health · [Comments](#)

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I'm sinking into the big brown leather chair in my shrink's office, once again. This shit is getting expensive on top of seeing my therapist regularly. But someone's gotta manage my medication issues. Slumped over, I feel empty, fucked up. Exhausted and can't eat. I don't know what the fuck just happened. A few weeks ago everything seemed fine. Then depression hit me like a

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issues. Slumped over, I feel empty, fucked up. Exhausted and can't eat. I don't know what the fuck just happened. A few weeks ago everything seemed fine. Then depression hit me like a fucking 747.

If you have ever had clinical depression — not just feelings of sadness — then you know exactly what I'm talking about. The depression that has you thinking about how loud the sound would be when your body hits the pavement after you swan dive right out of that window 40 stories up. I am on the subway so often that I find myself staring at the tracks, my body swaying back and forth. Maybe I should just sway forth and fall in as the train barrels through the station. No, too messy. It's as if an alien has gotten into my brain. My body feels like it weighs tons, meanwhile I'm about 15 pounds under my normal weight. My eyes sunken, my soul sucked out of me and lost somewhere. Nothing. I actually feel nothing. I don't want to die. I just want to be myself again. But when this shit hits, that's where it takes my mind. And I lose control of myself.

"Leah I think I made a mistake when I diagnosed you with depression and anxiety. I think it's a little more serious."

What the fuck is this guy talking about? By the way, did I mention it's August 27 2012? My 30th birthday. Happy fucking birthday to me.

"I was looking back in my notes and re-reading texts you have sent me over the last year and your depression seems to come in waves in between times when you tell me how great everything is. I think you are classic manic-depressive and most likely have Bipolar II. The medication you are on probably isn't helping this at all, but maybe making it worse. I want you to try a mood stabilizer on top of your antidepressant." Wow. Really? I guess that would actually explain a lot.

There is no peace. No serenity. It is a state of needing more non-stop.

After we talk about all my symptoms and what my "up" periods feel like when I'm not depressed, it seems he could be onto something with this. I am a little relieved. At the same time, worried. I have a kid to take care of, a business to run. I want to get it under control. He starts me on new medication that day. And that is the official beginning of my love affair with my Bipolar II disorder.

I call it a love affair because it's a complex relationship I have with my so-called "mental illness." The medication he put me on that day I turned 30 was bad. Very bad. I thought things couldn't get much worse, but they did. I became a zombie. The exhaustion — holy fuck. I couldn't keep my eyes open. If I mustered up the energy to actually take a shower in the morning, I would pass right back out afterwards. I was blank. The ability to feel anything was gone. But the worse part was most definitely the exhaustion. I can't even find the words to describe it. Kier's dad had to pick up a lot of slack during those months. And he did so with grace and respect for me and what I was going through. The guilt of not being able to function as a mom was the only feeling I could feel during this time. It killed me. The brand suffered immensely. I couldn't go into the office. Obviously being creative was foreign at this point. I found myself sitting on the bathroom floor

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feet during this time. It killed me. The brand suffered immensely. I couldn't go into the office.

Obviously being creative was foreign at this point. I found myself sitting on the bathroom floor burning my arm with a cigarette. Who the fuck am I? I never did that type of self-harm shit. Ever. Not my thing.

My doctor kept upping my dosage thinking it would help. At that point I seriously started to feel like I was losing my mind. I told my mom I needed to go to Bellevue Hospital, but instead she had me throw out the bottle of medication. She watched me fall apart and literally lose my life over seven months on it. I threw them out and prayed my "self" would show up and stop hiding. And it did.

Over the next year or so I was pretty stable. Until I wasn't.

I was thriving professionally again. MTTM had a comeback of sorts. I had an intense energy to create again and go full steam ahead with the brand. I started my Bitchisms campaign around the city. The creative juices were flowing for sure. Sales were up and MOB was doing better than it ever had. I was busy, travelling all over the world for work and for fun. I was social, staying out late, not needing much sleep. I felt like I was on top of the world. The fact that this was possibly the manic part of manic depression never crossed my mind. When you are up and hypomanic, you don't want it to stop. There is no reason to call the doctor.

I turned a dark corner when my hypomania got out of control and became dangerous. It was so hard to see that I was out of control. I felt charming, seductive. I swear I even feel like during these elated times I look sexier and prettier. I was sexually insatiable, I spent a lot of money I didn't have, and I was agitated and impulsive. I'm not sure I'm explaining my hypomania in a way one can understand. But it's a constant hunger, a constant need for stimulation, constant thinking. Not hungry for food though. I barely eat during these episodes. There is no peace. No serenity. It is a state of needing more non-stop.

I thought it would be a great idea to go to Spain for a weekend even though I had just been there for two weeks not long before. I also thought it would be a great idea to change Kier's school out of nowhere, buy a couch that cost \$10,000 USD, and date a couple. I couldn't sit still and I couldn't stop spending money. Finally the mania ended and like clockwork the 747 of depression hit. BOOM. Floored me. I had no idea what hit me. I seemed to have forgotten the pattern. And once again I was sitting in the brown leather chair. In tears. But this time worried about my mascara running because I decided I had a crush on my doctor — the mania was lingering.

That was in the summer of 2014. I have been in remission, as they call it, since then. After trial and error I am on the right medication cocktail. Sometimes I want to go off it all but my support network of friends and family always talk me out of it. I'm creative but stable. I don't go out all night. I eat a healthy, balanced diet. I get a solid eight hours of sleep and I try to stay with a routine. I took up ice skating, and I go to the gym. Taking care of myself keeps my "episodes" at bay. When I feel they are coming on, I go see my doctor right away. Sometimes I need to make a little change in the dosage or add or take something away. But I kind of have it down to a science at this point...knock on wood.

Sometimes I wonder, who would I be without this chemical imbalance? Maybe this intensity my brain, body and being feels is what makes me who I am? This is why I call it a love affair. I love my

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Sometimes I wonder, who would I be without this chemical imbalance? Maybe this intensity my brain, body and being feels is what makes me who I am? This is why I call it a love affair. I love my intensity, I love who I am. Maybe without my Bipolar II, I wouldn't have MOB? But maybe if I didn't have Bipolar II MOB would be making \$100,000,000 USD a year. Who knows? I trust in the universe that all is how it should be. For whatever reason — maybe all the drugs I did as a teenager — this is the way my brain functions. Or maybe my brain was always like this and I was using the drugs at a young age to medicate. Sometimes after a woman experiences childbirth her hormones and brain chemistry changes, this could have also had an affect on me. I won't ever know.

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without this chemical imbalance?
Maybe this intensity my brain, body and
being feels is what makes me who I am?**

For a long time I felt sorry for myself that I had to deal with this. It takes up a lot of time. Self-introspection, meditation, doctor appointments, adjusting to meds, getting off meds, AA meetings, etc. It's a full-time job keeping myself mentally healthy. On top of that and being a mom and business owner, sometimes it can get overwhelming. However when I look back at my life, and when I look back at the last 12 years of MTTM, I see that a lot of my fearlessness with owning the brand and taking creative and professional risks probably has a lot to do with my episodes of hypomania. My best ideas and concepts came to me during these moments of my brain working in overdrive. My entrepreneurial spirit and my Bipolar II disorder are intertwined for certain.

A lot of people don't have the luxury of seeing a doctor or being able to afford the proper medication. I see first hand how expensive mental illness is to take care of. I've had to fight with my insurance company to cover some of my medication. I've had to search high and low for a doctor I like. This is a battle. And you have to be determined and persevering to get better. It can be daunting. The stigma around seeking help and admitting a chemical imbalance or emotional and mental issues seems to plague our society. [The topic makes people uncomfortable](#). I even have friends who don't like the idea that I need to take medication to be stable. They love me and it's hard for them to understand that I really do have this irregularity.

But the thing is, I'm totally OK with it. In fact, I see it as strength and have come to accept and appreciate it. It's part of who I am.

PHOTOGRAPHER PETER PABON/@THEWASTEDTALENT

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